



THE NORTHFIELD GARDEN CLUB

75th Anniversary: 1950 – 2025

Commemorative Booklet -- February 2025 Luncheon



The Northfield Garden Club 75th Anniversary

Contents:

"Northfield Garden Club Celebrates 75 years" by Pam Thompson

Letters from Past Presidents & Presentation from February 2025 Luncheon

Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Northfield Garden Club is to advance and promote the art and science of horticulture, and to encourage all forms of home and civic gardening projects in the Northfield area.



Northfield Garden Club Celebrates 75 years

By Pam Thompson, Associate Editor, Northfield News

In 2025, the Northfield Garden Club will celebrate 75 years of cultivating and propagating the city's parks and public spaces into verdant and vibrant places of vegetative splendor.

To mark its noteworthy anniversary, NGC plans to showcase six gardens on its annual summer tour, each honoring a significant contribution made by the club over the decades.

Members of the 75th anniversary planning committee report the two-day garden tour will include a past president's garden; a new member's garden; two favorite gardens from previous tours; a garden started by a previous member that is attached to an historic

property; and an ongoing community project in a city park.

Garden tour co-chairs Donna May and Elizabeth Olson said the club wants to emphasize the club's legacy by telling its story through the projects the club has undertaken.

"Since 1950 when our club began, we've been engaged in beautifying the community, educating our members and residents and forging friendships," explained Olson.

"Those have been our club's three pillars."

A Budding Beginning According to club records housed in the Northfield History Center archives, the NGC grew out of an organization called the Little Prairie Garden Club. There were 24 charter members, dues were 10cents per meeting and Mrs. Frank Trallet was the club's first president.



The original constitution stipulated that the purpose of the club "shall be to encourage all forms of gardening, home or community gardening, flower shows and to increase the pleasure derived therefrom."

Former club member Leona H. Openshaw researched and wrote a history of the first 50 years of the club from 1950-2000. According to her report, the club's activities in the 1960s began to reflect the era's interest in environmental issues, as well as indoor gardening in the form of houseplants, terrariums and dish gardens. In the 1970s, the club became even more concerned with the environment, nature crafts, herbs and the public landscape. In the 1980s, the club had its first plant auction, continued to be active in community gardening and added more field trips.



The 1990s were the decade when the club adopted an ambitious slate of committees working on a growing number of gardens around the city. By 1996, there were over 100 members.

"From 24 founding members to 100-plus, from flower shows to Art in Bloom. from a bed of petunias and cannas at Horsecollar Park to roses along the river, annuals and perennials in many parks, containers of color-coordinated flowers and hanging baskets adorning the downtown district, the club has produced a fine heritage, earned the respect of the town and adapted to the continually-evolving needs and interests of those who love gardens," wrote Openshaw.



Over the years, the club has adapted to the changing cultural and societal norms, explained current president Barbara Oertli. In an upcoming presentation which Oertli plans to deliver to the membership, she will emphasize how a wide variety of gardening, beautification and horticultural projects in the Northfield area have been maintained using grants, both from NGC and other organizations.



Oertli said each year volunteers from NGC plant summer annuals in Bridge Square, along the Pedestrian Bridge, the Riverwalk, the Pollinator Gardens of Riverside Park as well as several other downtown locations. The club funds these plantings which are purchased from local growers through proceeds from the annual Garden Tour.

Oertli said that after moving to Dundas in 2018, she heard about Northfield Garden Club from a new friend and fellow California native Claudia Gonzalez George. "We went on our first Garden Tour together, and soon after I ventured into my first meeting. I was interested in learning about gardening in this very different climate and also meeting people. The friendliness of the group was engaging, so I joined and signed up to volunteer my graphic design skills."

In no time, Oertli found herself helping Elizabeth Olson with the yearbook, and planting and weeding with the Bridge Square committee. "The energy and scope of projects this group has accomplished has impressed me," she said. "I became co-chair in 2023 and continued as chair this year. It's a great group for new retirees, people who enjoy learning, gardening, socializing and giving back to the community. The longevity of the group parallels other local groups which have an ebb and flow and evolve over time, I hope to be a small part in that forward motion for NGC. In the spring, Garden Club volunteers plant pansies and daffodils which are donated by the City of Northfield. In the winter, volunteers obtain holiday greenery from local sources to decorate those same areas of Bridge Square and the Riverwalk.

Lorraine Rovig, Past President, who has been an NGC member since 2014, said that many times she's been in the group that helped plant the displays on Bridge Square, on the bike trail and along the River Walk," she said. "We can't be out there without people thanking us."

Recently, the Board crafted a column for the Northfield News outlining all the projects the 75-year-old club manages. The list includes repainting the flowering bikes seen along Hwy 3 near the walking trail, which were a collaborative project funded by Northfield in Bloom (NGC acted as fiscal agent for this group), Northfield Shares and the City of

Northfield, a project imagined by Judy Code, Northfield Garden Club Past President. The bikes are now under the care of NGC, with paint reimbursement by the City of Northfield.

NGC has been involved in some of the larger collaborative gardening and planting projects over the years that include the Landscape Partnership Tree Project, the three raised pollinator gardens in Riverside Park and the recent Educational Kiosk.

The Landscape Partnership Tree Project was a large-scale tree planting program along Hwy 3 consisting of two separate grants. Phase I was a collaborative effort among the Northfield Garden Club, Knecht's Nursery, MNDOT, and the City of Northfield. Funding came from the Northfield Area Foundation, an award from MNDOT's Community Roadside Landscaping Partnership Fund, the Northfield Garden Club, and in-kind donations from Knecht's Nursery. In April of 2012, 64 trees were planted along the southern gateway of Highway 3.

Phase II was again a collaborative effort among the Northfield Garden Club, Knecht's Nurseries, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT), and the City of Northfield. Funding came from Northfield Shares, an award from MNDOT's Community Roadside Landscaping Partnership Fund, the Northfield Garden Club, and in-kind donations from Knecht's Nurseries. This second phase of planting in September of 2014 enhanced the northern gateway to Northfield along Highway 3 with 74 more trees. The tree species planted include birch, elms, maples, oaks, hackberries, serviceberries, lilacs and flowering crabapples.

In 2006, the NGC designed and funded the construction of a Pergola, memorial stone and rose garden for Riverside Park. NGC members maintain the Pergola and Memorial Rose Garden throughout each growing season.

"Our town is special," said Rovig. "And, I think it's interesting to know how it got that way with a women's club that started in 1950. I find it fascinating the contrast of the 1800s Victorian town compared with nearby towns of the same age that aren't half as exciting or beautiful."

Remembrances: Letters from Past Presidents

Kathryn Neset: 1972, 1973

I joined the NGC in the early 70s at the invitation of Faye Grastvedt, my neighbor. All of the 25 to 30 members were retired women who shared their love of gardening. They shared “tips” on their flowers and vegetables grown. And of course, they also shared good recipes. Programs were presented by the members with an occasional guest speaker. Our elected officers planned the yearly agenda and we hand-produced a booklet for the year’s schedule. We met in members’ homes. One highlight of each year was our Christmas get-together. Our daughter Ann (age 2, 3,4,5, and 6) was an honorary member. I was young when asked to become the president and was not sure I could do this, but these women promised they would help me and became lifelong friends.

We started the round flowerbed on Bridge Square. We were asked by the city to plant the flowers. City employees prepared the bed for us and watered. We paid \$5.00 in membership dues that helped buy the plants: canna bulbs, marigolds, asters, petunias, etc. Our members did all the maintenance, planting and weeding.

One year we introduced our membership to a plant exchange. Later years we expanded that exchange to the public to help pay for the flowerbed plantings.

These are the basic beginnings for an organization that evolved and provided beauty to the City of Northfield and its visitors. Celebrating 75 years!



Kathleen Stevenson: 1990,1991

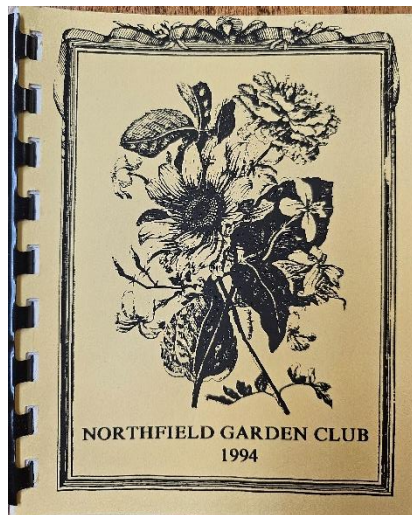
A group of us young moms with preschoolers decided to check out the Northfield Garden Club, so we arranged childcare and arrived at Norma Ause's house. As soon as we stepped into her lovely backyard, we were immediately and warmly greeted. It was a bit overwhelming, but in the best way. Looking around, we quickly realized we were "young blood," as it looked like the average age was 75. Yet, despite the age differences, we were embraced wholeheartedly at every meeting. The ladies not only welcomed us, but also encouraged us to get involved, join committees, and even take on leadership roles. The club was deeply connected to the community. And one year, we helped host a weekend gardening event at a local school. There were speakers, we were filmed for the TV station, vendors, and we crafted giant flowers on long dowels to sell. We planted gardens downtown, and hosted Garden Walks for the community. The friendships I formed and the cherished memories from my time with the club are treasures I hold dear.



Sam Sunderin: 1994

I joined the Garden Club the first year we moved here from St. Louis Park. My husband Dean and I bought a small farm about 10 miles west of Northfield in 1988. Dean traveled for his work, and I was having difficulty in meeting people, and was quite isolated. While working at the Northfield Greenhouse, I met a young woman who took me to a Garden Club meeting and introduced me to some of her favorite members. One of these women remains one of my best friends to this day. All of the members were incredibly welcoming. Having a few friends in a new town made a huge difference.

The year I was president is a bit of a blur. My husband was working in Alaska, coming home for weekends, and I was trying to supervise the building of our new home. At the time, it was tradition for the president of the Garden Club to hold the annual picnic at her home. When we started planning the party, we were living in a tiny trailer next to the construction site. We were, with fingers crossed, planning on moving into the new house shortly before the Garden Club picnic. A week before the party, Dean came home and started backfilling dirt around the house. It was an absolute mud hole. Definitely not like the beautiful, well-tended gardens the members were used to seeing when they went to the annual picnic. I was visualizing an absolute train wreck of a party. Fortunately, when we started planning the party earlier in the year, we knew the yard probably would not be finished so I wrote to the members and asked each of them to wear a hat that they had decorated with flowers and greens, explaining that they were to be my perennial garden for the day. The member response was enthusiastic, and incredibly creative. These charming women more than made up for the lack of landscaping. It was a lovely day and a very fond memory for me



Linda Dallavalle: 1995, 1996

I joined the Garden Club when I first moved to Northfield, and there I met some forever friends such as Carolyn Hogan, Vicki Behr, Lucy Archibald, and many more. I also met some of Northfield's prominent people, including Millie DeMann, Norma Ause, Marion Hvistendahl, and many others. Betsy Maitland may have passed on, but she lives in my garden whenever her Siberian Irises bloom.

The club was growing very fast when I was asked to lead it, and there seemed to be so many community projects to develop and grow. Just prior to my presidency, Mary Margaret Steinhoff worked with the city to purchase the concrete pots for Bridge Square, and she led a group to design, plant, and maintain those. Smaller gardens in several parks were built that had to be planted and maintained. The one in Way Park still remains. Carolyn Hogan started artistic plantings in the circle garden at Bridge Square. All our volunteers were so enthusiastic and dependable. The main concern of the club was keeping all the projects maintained, while making sure no one was getting burned out.

A favorite event of mine during 1996 was a bus trip to Art in Bloom at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The speaker was a flower arranger who was not only entertaining but so informative. Oh, and there was lunch, and oh yes, flower arrangements.

Some staples in my gardens are from the annual plant sales, and they include Leann Stremcha's wild ginger, Kathleen Stevenson's Hyperion daylilies, and Connie Albers's catmint.

Every year, memories of those wonderful people come back to me as do many fond memories in the Northfield Garden Club.



Carol Korda: 2002, 2003

I joined the Garden Club shortly after we moved to Northfield in January 1993. It proved a wonderful way to meet new neighbors and connect with others who have a passion for flower gardening. My involvement in the Garden Club also led to my becoming a Master Gardener through the U of M's Extension Service. As part of my commitment to the Master Gardener program I offered consultation advice and support to local gardeners seeking assistance.

I served as president of the Garden Club in the early 2000s and have remained active. Our membership continues to grow and flourish and the Club adds so much to the quality of life in Northfield.

My favorite activity for the Club was the spring plant sale. I recall our side yard being filled with plants waiting to be transported to Bridge Square. My recollection is that for several years we netted upwards of \$2,000. That activity also promoted the club and led to new members.



Rosalee Forkner: 2006

"The Story Quilt" -- We bought our retirement home in Northfield in 1999. The yard was a blank slate. Although experienced gardeners, there was no plan. Then, we discovered Northfield Garden Club (NGC) has open meetings, and Newbies are welcome. What a gift to meet the fine gardeners who shared seeds & plants & rhizomes; knowledge of botany; creative ideas; gardening experiences and energy. As friendships grew, so did our gardens.

NGC programs continue to respect creation, be varied, and are educational and interesting. A few long-standing traditions: spring plant & bake sale; shared laughter and "digging in the dirt" at Bridge Square; beautiful garden tours. NGC gives back to the community via many programs including grants to "Everybody Park"*, Greenvale Community Garden, the pergola, Hwy 3 trees.

As president, I enjoyed NGC long-time members as well as new members and guests. In order to tighten business aspects I: secured a PO Box as NGC address, had bank account signature cards include several NGC officers, increased insurance policy to protect NGC officers from personal liability, and worked with Home & Garden Show to waive fee and give NGC high visibility for booth space.

Another gift of the NGC is the lasting legacy of the founders as they befriended others who in turn mentored the newest members. The sharing of ideas, ideals and goals is of great value. Peggy, Claire, Barbara, Margaret, Marcia, Molly, Nancy, Carol, Mary-these are only a few of the amazing women (and a few good men) who were and are leaders in several endeavors. Their names may not be remembered, but their legacy will live on for years. ***May the Northfield Garden Club continue to plant for decades and generations to come.***

** In 2005 the Northfield Garden Club gifted the Northfield City Park Department \$1,500.00 to buy a planter and landscaping for Every Body Park, an ADA accessible playground, located at Spring Creek Park at the intersection of Jefferson Parkway and Maple Street. There is an open play area adjacent to the soccer complex.*

Judy Code: 2007, 2008

The Garden Club has been an enormously important organization to me since I joined in 2003. I was newly retired from teaching ECSE at Longfellow School and needed something worthwhile to fill my time. I had always gardened with flowers and vegetables since moving to Northfield and I really "dug in" to this club and learned a lot, eventually becoming a Master Gardener through the U of M. For me, it was life changing.

Over the years, I have been most proud of the beautification of Northfield that I led. It was suggested to NGC in 2007 when I was president that we join the America in Bloom national contest. Red Wing agreed to sponsor us in this contest. Northfield in Bloom was formed as an independent organization, but the Garden club acted as our treasurer of gifted monies since the original members were primarily garden club members. After getting approval and the entry fee of \$2,000 from the club we proceeded to tackle beautification projects throughout the city. The plan was to coordinate the flower colors in the pots and baskets throughout the town as seen in the Pedestrian Bridge, Riverwalk Pots, tables and umbrellas on Riverwalk, Northfield signages, Bicycles, Pollinator Gardens and quality of flowers. We now use only Proven Winners flowers that are specially grown for us by two growers.



EdDee Imm: 2011, 2012

My fondest memories of the Garden Club were of the special trips we made to see other gardens. They usually took us to parts of the metro, and we spent at least half a day seeing different gardens. Our Garden Tours in Northfield were good for the community and helped to nurture good will for the club and raise money for our projects.

My favorite project was the planting of the trees along Hwy. 3's South Gateway. It was like having a baby. It took 9 months to plan and get it in motion. We had the backing of the Garden Club, and worked with the MN DNR Grants Program and partnered with Knecht's to provide the trees. We planted over 70 trees and mulched them with the help of Garden Club members. Then we contracted with Knecht's to water the trees for 2 years.

There is nothing more important for the Garden Club than to beautify Northfield and improve our environment.



Erika Tallman: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

FOND MEMORIES

The Northfield Garden Club was the highlight of my retirement to Northfield. As many of you know, I was a novice gardener when I retired to town and was learning through trial and error and copying from garden club members. Some of the lessons were hard-learned (deer taught me about dead heading when one morning they ate every rose in my garden. The flowers came back even more beautiful than before.) I learned most from my Northfield Garden Club friends and their beautiful gardens. The open garden tours with the resident artists were wonderful. Not only was I able to purchase many beautiful pieces of garden art, but we met Riki Nelson, an artist whose senior art class Dan's mother, Lois, enjoyed for the last 10 years of her life. And, by browsing the gardens and asking LOTS of questions, I learned what would and would not work in Minnesota.



Among the many lessons I learned:

- **READ THE LABELS:** Just because the nurseries sell them, doesn't mean the plants will survive MN winters, especially those from Zone 12!
- It is important to choose plants for the beauty of their leaves...flowers are fleeting.
- Some plants should never be planted in your fertile flower beds. Snow on the Mountain really took over my garden and the extensive, and deep, roots were nearly impossible to destroy.

- Gardens look different every year. I planted two ground covers in my water feature garden: Vinca Vine and Money Wort. Each year they competed. Some years I had a purple paradise and others a yellow explosion. Who knew!
- Just because it doesn't come up until June doesn't mean it is dead. The hibiscus taught me this lesson when I was distraught that my beautiful plate-sized, perennial hibiscus seemed to be gone. I sure was delighted when one warm June day they began to poke their shoots out of the ground.

Probably I had the most fun from all the projects that the club and I undertook. Building the first club website was a real challenge, but great fun. The various

beautification projects around town were wonderful and great exercise too. I really enjoyed the tree planting projects, the renovation of the pergola, the annual planting of the downtown pots and hanging plants under Judy Code's direction, and the design and purchase of garden club mugs and purple t-shirts.



I am grateful for how the Northfield Garden Club members enriched my life. I miss all the members. Everyone was so friendly and inviting and made my move to Northfield a delight. I hope you all are well and that the club is continuing to thrive.



Lorraine Rovig: 2017, 2018

A long time ago when I was president (two presidents ago), I noticed many passersby would stop to compliment us as we planted our seasonal flowers in Bridge Square and elsewhere about town. Very few knew we were the local Garden Club so I ordered a sign that said NORTHFIELD GARDEN CLUB AT WORK to post by our pile of flower flats or other garden goods. That sign continues to be a very easy way to advertise our existence and our work. (I note that very often among our members it is Seniors At Work to make Northfield beautiful as younger members have less time during the day.)

My well-organized predecessor, Erika Tallman, made charts of the month-by-month tasks the president needed to do and the duties with timing for each of our officers (vice president, treasurer, and secretary). They kept me on target for my two years.

I'm proud to have served two terms and very much enjoy continuing our work on the many NGC projects with our wonderful members to make Northfield a truly beautiful place.



Elizabeth K Beery Olson: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 co-president

After retiring from teaching music full-time for the Minneapolis Public Schools I moved from Farmington to Northfield and began my first serious adventure with gardening. Up to that point I had not had the time or energy. With two “purple thumbs” as I liked to call them, I needed all the help I could get, so I took the 2010 NGC Garden Tour to see what grew well in Northfield and then decided to attend the club meetings that fall to meet others who would be supportive as I ventured into new territory.

When I learned that not only would the Garden Club members help me with my gardening questions but also helped beautify parks and public spaces around the city of Northfield, I was all in. And it was not long before I was planting trees along Highway 3, opening my own garden for the Garden Tour, and chairing the tour committee. I admit that had I not become treasurer I don't think I would have volunteered to be president.

My second year as president COVID hit. The NGC board and I reorganized the meetings and planned programs with safety in mind. Some were held via Zoom and others outdoors. That was the year we started making holiday wreaths out at Homestead Brosseau Farm. We also decided to discontinue the plant sale and reimagined the garden tour so there would be minimum contact between garden sitters and visitors. And for the only time in the club's history, the 2021 annual February luncheon was replaced by a webinar available through the Minnesota State Horticultural Society.

The best part of being in the Garden Club since 2010 has been my getting to know so many wonderful people who have enriched my life. I enjoyed and continue to enjoy working with such a vibrant group that has grown from around 50 members when I first joined to around 70 members as of 2025.

